

# Arcola downs Blue Ridge, battles No. 3 Decatur LSA

By Mike Monahan

DECATUR – Arcola played Decatur LSA, a team that was 15-0 and ranked No. 3 in Class 1A in the first Associated Press rankings of the New Year.

The Lions scored the first 13 points of the game and although Arcola got as close as two midway through the third before losing 64-56 on Friday.

The Purple Riders scored 12 of the first 13 points in the

opening 9:18 and went to top Blue Ridge, a team that was 6-9, 51-22 at Arcola's Nancy Stiff Gymnasium Jan. 3 in the first game of the 2023 portion of the schedule.

## Decatur LSA 64, Arcola 56

Arcola trailed the Lions, who have not had a game decided by less than six (Tri-Valley and Central A&M) by

two 31-29 after a bucket by Jackson in the third quarter.

However, LSA used an 11-0 run starting with two buckets by Sebastian Hill and a steal and layup by Lleyton Miller. A 3-pointer with 2:17 left in the third by Hill and another basket by Hill before Arcola stopped the run with a 3-pointer by Jackson Miller.

An LSA scoreboard operator error gave Arcola three extra points after Miller made a pair of free throws. A 3-pointer by Miller and suddenly the Purple Riders had cut a 14-point deficit in the fourth quarter to nine. However, Arcola didn't get closer than seven before falling by eight.

LSA started strong, scoring the first 13 points of the game and when it was 6-0 Gisinger purposely got a technical to try and fire his team up.

Arcola got its first basket of the game on a 3-pointer by Aldo Garcia. The Lions led 17-4 after the first eight minutes.

The second quarter was much better for Arcola as they scored the first seven points of the second on a three-pointer by Jackson Miller, a putback by Braden Phillips and a pair of free throws by Gerardo Alanis against the Lions man-to-man defense. Arcola's 11-4 run was stopped by a basket by Collins. LSA led 25-16 when the Purple Riders cut the lead down to four on a three-point play by Miller. The Lions led 27-21 at the half.

Arcola was led by Miller with 24 points and Garcia with 13, while Collings had 26 and Hill 17 for the Lions.

LSA outrebounded Arcola



ARCOLA HIGH SCHOOL junior Gerardo Alanis (2) drives the lane for a basket in the varsity game with Blue Ridge played Tues., Jan. 3 in Arcola. Arcola's varsity won 51-22. Photo by Nancy Rairden.

41-31 and shot 47 percent to 28 percent for Arcola, who fell to 7-8 overall and 1-1 in the LPC. The Purple Riders played at Villa Grove Tuesday in another LPC game.

## Arcola 51, Blue Ridge 22

Arcola didn't allow a field goal until a basket by Zach Lewis 10 minutes into the

game as the Purple Riders led 12-3. The Knights, who fell to 6-11, remained within nine points after a putback by Colin Michaels.

Arcola put the game away with the final 14 points of the half, including six by Phillips for a 28-5 advantage at the break.

The Knights, who beat Cumberland 55-50 Friday, played a 1-2-2 zone defense.

"We have seen that (1-2-2) a little bit," said Arcola coach Greg Gisinger. "Dieterich ran it a little bit. Oblong-Palestine-Hutsonville ran it some and so did Grayville although it was a different type, but they ran it kind of similar. I think we got what we wanted. Jackson is shooting around 40 percent from 3 this year. He was off. So, we made an emphasis on getting the ball inside to sophomore Braden Phillips. Making him look to score instead of looking to pass. I thought he did a good job of looking to score the basketball and being big inside and getting the ball in the middle at mid-post where he wanted it. Hats off to him. The guys got him the ball. They understood and that is what I like about this team right now. Jackson didn't have his best night, but he sacrificed that for the good of the team and we got the ball into Phillips more and let him kind of have his night. That is kind of who we are becoming and I think that is really good for the future."

Three Purple Riders led the team in scoring with 23 by Phillips, 13 by Miller and 10 by Gerardo Alanis.

Arcola led 44-15 after three quarters and the running clock started with a 3-pointer by D. J. Stevens early in the fourth.

Foul trouble stopped Gisinger from using full-court pressure. Despite holding the Knights to a season low of 22 points (previous low was 34) and holding Blue Ridge to 23 percent shooting from the

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ARCOLA HIGH SCHOOL junior Tyson Lewis (5) goes up strong to the basket in the varsity game with Blue Ridge played Tues., Jan. 3 in Arcola. Arcola's varsity won 51-22. Photo by Nancy Rairden.

# Arcola girls win three straight home games, now 13-4

By Mike Monahan

ARCOLA – Home is where the heart is and Arcola's girls team has now gone 5-1 at home, including three wins between Jan. 5 and 9.

Arcola used a strong third quarter to break away from a one-point halftime lead against Okaw Valley and went on to win 55-35.

The Lady Riders scored the final 11 points of the game to pull away from Hoopston Area, winning 49-33 and Arcola cruised past Heritage 61-14.

Arcola improved to 13-4 overall and 5-0 in the conference ahead of Thursday's LPC game at Cerro Gordo against Cerro Gordo/Bement.

## Arcola 55, Okaw Valley 35

Arcola led just 21-20 at the half before taking control in the third quarter as they led 28-23 after a 3-pointer by

Okaw Valley's Rissa Montgomery with 5:52 remaining in the quarter.

The Lady Riders reeled off 17 of the next 19 points to lead 45-25 with 7:16 remaining in the game.

Mackenzie Thomas scored on an assist by Jacey Kessler; Kacie Sisk had a putback and a 3-pointer by Kessler, who banked it in from the side, made it 35-23.

"We startled out well and they came back and finished the half well," said Arcola coach Corey Roberts. "I just kind of challenged them at halftime and they responded. I would have to look back, but I think 22 points has got to be one of our higher quarters. Our whole message at halftime is we were just holding the ball, holding the ball, and we would make one or two reversals and their defense could set back up. I thought we moved the ball a lot better in the third quarter."

Okaw Valley went 7:05 without a field goal going 0-for-8 during that time.

The girls played hard," said Okaw Valley coach Brad Ackers, who coached the Timberwolves to a fourth place finish in 2017-18 behind the play of Paige Robinson, who is in her final year at Illinois State after spending four years at Drury University. "The girls are buying in. We do play a tough schedule (Tuscola, Effingham St. Anthony, Our margin of errors is just not large length to withstand 6-0 or 8-0 runs. I know it ended up being a 14-0 run and that is a credit to Arcola. They got out in transition and found a couple of open girls. We need to help the helper and they just found the open girl for a layup a couple of times."

Arcola was just 3-of-17 from the field in the final 12:41 of the first half.

"Even though their record

(4-15 prior to the game) was not that good coach always told us 'no matter if the record is bad or good you still have to think that they are way better than you are. Going into the game you are always trying to make all of the shots so you can get ahead."

Arcola was led by Kacie Sisk and Kelsey Moore with 14 and 10 points respectively, while the other starters had nine (Eva Hopkins), eight (Thomas) and seven (Kessler).

"Being only ahead by one point doesn't feel very well on your shoulder," said Thomas of halftime. "Once we got talked to at halftime it changed a little bit throughout the game. Getting our motivational yell at halftime is something that I feel put a chip in everyone's brains. We needed to go faster and harder because they don't like to run."

Roberts liked to see the balanced scoring.

The Timberwolves were led in scoring by Madison Whitney with eight points, including all five free throws.

Okaw Valley led only once on a 3-pointer by Whitney. The Lady Riders took the lead for good with an 8-0 run as Thomas scored on a putback, Kelsey Moore had a steal and layup (one of 21 turnovers by the Timberwolves) and a 12-footer by Kacie Sisk pushed

the lead to 8-3.

"They (Okaw Valley) kind of mixed it up a little with zone and man-to-man," said Roberts. "It was nice to see man because we had not seen man-to-man in awhile. You would think we would have the zone figured out by now as much as we play against it. But we are still working though it.

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ARCOLA HIGH SCHOOL junior Kelsey Moore (11) goes for a basket while being guarded by a player from Hoopston Area in a game played Sat., Jan. 7 in Arcola. Arcola's varsity won 49-33. Photo by Nancy Rairden.



ARCOLA HIGH SCHOOL senior Mackenzie Thomas (20) fights for possession of the ball in a game played with Hoopston Area on Sat., Jan. 7 in Arcola. Arcola's varsity won 49-33. Photo by Nancy Rairden.



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